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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [BB](#) [XL](#)  
SUBJECT: BARBADOS LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE: PROMISING  
FOUR-LOVE RESULT IN NEXT ELECTION

Classified By: CDA Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary: The ruling Barbados Labour Party (BLP) met over the weekend for their annual conference. Prime Minister Owen Arthur did not announce the date for the next general election, as some had expected. He did, however, promise to run again and to deliver another big BLP victory. The BLP's 68th conference was also a jubilant celebration of the BLP's 12 years in power, an emotional tribute to several retiring BLP luminaries, including Foreign Minister Dame Billie Miller, and a spirited attack on the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP). End Summary.

"FOUR-LOVE"  
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12. (U) At the height of his popularity, Prime Minister Arthur was clearly enjoying what was essentially a celebration of his leadership and his party's unprecedented 12 years in power. Prior to the BLP conference, speculations were swirling in the media that the Prime Minister would announce the next election over the weekend. Instead, he said jokingly to his audience: "I must remind you that the next general elections are constitutionally due by August 2008." While he admitted that after three terms in office it would be easy for him "just to ride off into the sunset," he assured his audience that he would run again because he still had much to contribute. As a true cricket fan, he predicted that the election results, whether they come in 2006, 2007, or 2008, would be "four-love" for the BLP.

"CONTINUING TO MAKE LIFE BETTER IN BARBADOS"  
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13. (U) The theme of the BLP conference, "Continuing to Make Life Better in Barbados," encapsulates the BLP's approach to the next general election. The BLP will continue its drive to highlight the government's achievements over the past 12 years, and promise more of the same to the voters. During his keynote address, Prime Minister Arthur was not shy about recounting the successes of his government. He spoke at length about Barbados' growing economy, tax reform and relief, innovative social programs to assist the youth and small businesses, housing for the poor, and many other initiatives, all of which he described as ways the BLP has sought to help the "small black man." He also included Barbados' preparations for the 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC) among the government's achievements, and predicted that the CWC will be a great success.

¶4. (U) Turning to his government's challenges, the Prime Minister spoke of the unsettled nature of the world beset by conflicts, violence, cynicism, hatred, and exercise of "brutal power by the powerful." He told his audience that Barbados must not lose hope or succumb to doubt when faced with such challenges, and others, including rising energy prices, declining sugar industry, growing competition for foreign markets and capital, and decreasing foreign assistance. To meet the last two challenges, he called on Barbadians to become "financiers of our own development."

¶5. (U) Alluding to Barbados' upcoming 40th independence day anniversary, Prime Minister Arthur promised his party comrades that Barbados will show the world that "life begins at 40." He recounted a long list of economic reforms his government would implement both before and after the general election. Most of these measures were designed to tackle the rising inflation, government's debt, current account deficit, and real estate prices. He also returned to a theme he had raised a few weeks earlier of the need to reaffirm Barbados' traditional values in face of the "bombardment" of negative social and cultural influences. To that end, he announced a November 27 meeting of government, church, and civil society leaders to consult and agree on a course of "national renewal, recommitment, and refreshment."

"30 YEARS IS A LONG TIME, COMRADES"

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¶6. (U) With those words, Dame Billie Miller, Barbados' Foreign Minister and a BLP stalwart, bid her party good-bye. Dame Billie, along with two other BLP legends, former minister and current Member of Parliament Louis Tull and Speaker of the House Ishmael Roett, looked back at their storied careers and sought to inspire the next generation of

BLP leaders to "give (themselves) lock, stock, and barrel to the political process," in the words of Dame Billie. Their departure from electoral politics represents an end of an era, since both Dame Billie and Tull were the last BLP leaders to have sat in Tom Adams' cabinet in the 1970s.

A WMD AND A DEVIOUS MIND

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¶7. (U) Prime Minister Arthur brought the house down with a stinging attack on the DLP and its leaders. Likening the DLP's shadow finance minister, Dr. David Estwick, to a "weapon of mass destruction," Prime Minister Arthur sought to discredit Estwick's criticism of his government's economic policies and to cast doubt on the DLP's plans for the country. He charged the DLP's leader, David Thompson, with creating a "climate of fear" and called his attacks the "duplicitous work of a devious mind." Turning personal, he noted that even though Thompson has been attacking the BLP-led government for land sales to foreigners, he has made a fortune in his private law practice from those same land sales. He dispatched in a similar fashion with Thompson's criticisms related to immigrant labor by noting that Thompson's grandfather came to Barbados from Guyana.

COMMENT

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¶8. (C) While the BLP conference did not bring the much anticipated elections announcement, the BLP's leaders clearly sought to prepare the party's rank and file for the upcoming fight. The fiery rhetoric played well with the audience, and certainly matches the sharp tone adopted by the DLP. Neither party is likely to let up. With the DLP struggling to gain traction with the voters, its leaders must continue to look for chinks in the BLP armored political machine. As the Barbadian public has seen in the past few weeks, those chinks can take either policy or personal form. The BLP is also unlikely to sit back. It must convince the voters that even after 12 years in power, it retains the energy and vision to continue leading the country and to address the concerns of the Barbadians.

19. (C) While the two parties' campaigns will probably remain focused on domestic issues, references such as those of Prime Minister Arthur to the "brutal power" exercised by the powerful may continue to creep into both parties' campaign rhetoric. They betray an undercurrent of anti-U.S. resentment in the Caribbean, and unfortunately, they are popular with the public. We have made great strides toward mending our relations with the region, which had been frayed by disagreements over Haiti and Iraq and by the perception that the United States lost interest in the region. Secretary Rice's meetings with the CARICOM foreign ministers,

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the revived trade discussions, and preparations for the 2007 Caribbean Heritage Month celebrations have given our efforts to establish a more reliable and enduring partnership with the region a new momentum.

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